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# The Soviets' worst enemy

The Soviet Union is once again its own worst enemy. By detaining The Christian Science Monitor's Moscow correspondent on his return from covering the anniversary celebration of the Helsinki accords, it shuts off a sympathetic source of news about Russian life and government.

The correspondent, Gary Thatcher, has been the Monitor's man in Moscow for about two years. He is no apologist for the Soviet system, but has consistently looked beyond the Kremlin handouts and the Pravda rewrites, seeking to portray the color and mood of Russian life, the problems confronting the country and its responses to them.

Last week Thatcher was detained at Leningrad by uniformed border guards of the KGB while returning to the Soviet Union from the Helsinki meeting. His car was searched, and notes, files and tape recordings were confiscated.

Although some of the materials related to

alleged Soviet human-rights violations - including a tape of a press conference given in Helsinki by Avital Shcharansky, wife of the imprisoned Jewish dissident Anatoly Shcharansky - the security agents also seized copies of dispatches by the official Soviet news agency Tass, on the grounds that they contained references to the US Central Intelligence Agency.

The materials have been returned, in a manner that appears apologetic. Nevertheless, much harm has been done.

American journalists, including Thatcher, will continue to report on the Soviet Union in a professional manner, but the memory of this chilling incident cannot help but affect their perspective and color their reporting.

To the extent that the detaining of Thatcher, and the seizure of his notes, forces American journalists to subconsciously react in their reporting, the Soviets have done themselves more harm than good.

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